

An Example of a Learning Story

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With thanks to Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee

Josie Drips Down a Hill





Josie had been painting a while when I saw her make a hill by pushing the paper toward the paint tray.



I had never seen anyone do this before, so I began to take pictures. Josie was closely watching the paint.



Josie touched the brush to the painting at the top of the hill. A drip slowly ran down the hill making a blue line.



Josie filled her brush again and added more blue paint at the top of the slope in the very same place.



Then she added paint to the pink area on top of the hill.



This second drop of paint began to slide down hill through the pink area. The first drip line was now all the way at the bottom.



Josie pushed the paper towards the paint tray and made the hill steeper. The drip was going almost straight down now.



She added more paint to the top.



Josie watched intently as the drip slowly made its way to the bottom of the hill.



What it means:

Josie, you discovered how to make paint draw a line by sliding down a hill. You concentrated on how it moved. Not only were you a painter, today you were a scientist. You did an experiment. You watched the effect of the hill on the drip that you caused. That careful looking is how scientists discover how things work.

You wondered about something and figured it out.



Opportunities and Possibilities

Josie seems to have a disposition to wonder and be intrigued with the physical properties of paint that is worth exploring in greater detail. We can bring out the easels tomorrow with thick paint and water that she can mix. Eye droppers may help, too.

We will want to show these drip lines to the other children, for it may spark their interest, too. Then a group of children might have some ideas of what to try next.

Parent's voice:

“Josie you are amazing. I see you do this kind of close looking many times. Now you can see yourself doing it, too.”

“It was a joy to read this story to Josie.”
We read it over again and again.”

“I never would have paid any attention to those horizontal lines at the bottom of her painting without seeing the pictures of her absolute concentration in making them.”

“Thank you, teachers, for stopping to look at this precious person we love.”

A Learning Story is first and foremost a story. It tells a tale to the child, to the family, to guests, and to ourselves as teachers of children. There is not one right way to do it.

However, it does begin with the child's initiative and progresses through the subsequent stages of engagement (becoming involved) and intentionality (causing something). It is always about "good" things.

A Learning Story Convention *(a way to start making them in order to evolve forward)*

1. Begin with your own interest in what the child has taken the initiative to do. When you talk about yourself in the first person using "I..." you give a "voice" to the storyteller. The observer brings a perspective that is essential to the tale. Like every good story, it has a title.

2. Describe what the child does and says from your perspective as someone who cares and is listening closely to discover what is happening. It is not totally objective: you are present with your heart.

3. Title a paragraph "What it means" and write about significance of what you saw. This meaning-making is best done in a dialogue with other teachers. Many perspectives can be included here. If this is voiced directly to the child, the child can hear you speak your words.

4. Title a second paragraph "Opportunities and Possibilities" and describe what we can do next and what the future may hold. This gives insight to the participants in the school about how teachers think about what they do.

5. Offer a blank page for the family to respond with their view. Many members of the family may have things to say to the child and to the teachers.